

Counterexample Philosophical (Thought) Experiment: Modal Semantic Issues, Epistemic Normativity, and a Normalcy Account

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Abstract

Raising counterexample philosophical thought experiments (hereafter philosophical experiments) is one major method of analytic philosophy to refute theses or principles. Various mainstream theories address the modal semantics and modal epistemology of philosophical experiments. However, for a given vignette of a particular philosophical experiment, the semantic value of the original core modal judgement may be changed by adding more details to the vignette. This deviant realisation approach forms a major challenge to semantic as well as epistemological theories. This paper has three objectives. First, focusing on the epistemic normativity of how to properly understand the methodological features of philosophical experimentation, the connections between the semantic and epistemic aspects of philosophical experiments are clarified. Moreover, why the eradication of deviant realisations is not the only semantic option is explained accordingly. Second, by setting up semantic and epistemic conditions for their theories to satisfy, why mainstream theories of philosophical experiment—Malmgren's, Ichikawa and Jarvis', Williamson's, and Grundmann and Horvath's—fail their modal semantic and/or epistemological accounts are explained. An inductive argument is offered to show that semantic and epistemic theories based on standard possible world semantics do not seem to have good prospects of success. Third, by means of epistemic normativity and Gardiner's and Geddes' formulations of normalcy, a normalcy account of philosophical experiments is established.

Key Words: counterexample philosophical (thought) experiment, deviant realization, epistemic normativity, normalcy